

EDWARD BROWN
COMMENTARY
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John Vervase--a white member of the Newark Board of Education is protesting a decision by the board--which has a black majority--to display the black liberation in all Newark schools which have a majority of black students. And that, it appears, would be just about all of them. Vervase says the decision is illegal and unpatriotic.

It has also been reported that pictures of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln have been disappearing from Newark's school rooms.

Banishing familiar and cherished symbols would be an unfortunate overreaction by Newark's black school leaders but, I'm afraid, it is only consistent, in this era of social competition, with actions by ethnic groups which have retreated into cultural strongholds--using their special identities as fortress walls against all other groups. For many people, the law of the melting pot has been repealed.

The black liberation flag does not represent all the students of all the Newark schools just as the confederate flag is alien to blacks in southern schools. The courts have been known to forbid the display of symbols which some people find offensive. And in other cases there have been reasonable compromises.

As symbols of identity--liberation flags--confederate flags--portraits of Lincoln and Washington are all compatible. They can exist side by side as examples of our diversity--reminders of our history--and proof that we are, as a people, a collection of minorities. But when one symbol precludes all others--when one replaces other symbols--then the act is negative--tyrannical and divisive.

In the case of the now overwhelmingly black Newark schools, the flag issues was perhaps as inevitable as it is likely to be temporary.

As upsetting as this incident may be to Newark's white citizens, it is quite proper that they ask themselves--what made them think that a black majority--now recently come to power--would be more democratic--more forgiving--more sensitive than the white majority rule which preceded it.